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ABSTRACT

This speech suggests that public radio stations should examine and use the techniques employed by commercial stations to increase their listening audience--creative promotion based on community involvement and participation. Some examples are included. (SC)

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Remarks by Jonathan Hall

"The Business of Radio Promotion"

National Public Radio Panel

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IR004344

Commercials or No Commercials --- It's Still Radio

I feel a little like John Warner today. John, as you may know is the former head of the National Bicentennial Commission and recently married Elizabeth Taylor: "I know what I'm supposed to do, but can I make it interesting enough?"

I assume that we'll hear many definitions of radio promotion during this discussion, but my working definition is "anything that you or your staff does to increase your listening audience."

Some promotions, I must admit, are real turkeys...such as the Thanksgiving promotion that a midwest station used a couple of years ago. The station was holding a "turkey shoot" and for the grand finale a live turkey with a $1000 bill tied to its leg was to be released from an airplane. All day long, the station aired ID's proclaiming "Everyone looks up to KXXX." After the plane made several passes, the bird was released. Unfortunately, KXXX overlooked one minor point...a domesticated turkey can't fly.

Simply stated, I believe in radio promotion because once you achieve a format that you've built, lived-with, nurtured and are happy with and proud of, then you want people to listen to it. So, you've got to promote it. But, to rework an often used phrase, many times we promote our trees and never the forest. Sure, public radio is different, and that difference can form the basis for many exciting promotional campaigns, but so are

country radio, and MOR radio, progressive and all news radio -- all different. But, it's still radio.

And there's one quality that really makes radio unique -- imagination. Listen to this:

TEXAS HIGHWAY SPOT

The pictures are not always prettier on radio, but (as this PSA illustrates,) it is radio's ability to evoke the imagination of its listeners that makes it unique. Television cannot come close to being a "theatre of the mind." (I'm sure we've all had a similar experience to this one):

YOU DON'T LOOK LIKE I THOUGHT YOU WOULD SPOT

If I have one criticism of my industry, it is that we tend to disregard RADIO MAGIC. Have you ever taken a group of kids on a tour of your station? If you have, then you've seen the magic registered in their eyes. Listen how to this NAB/Stan Freeberg sound:

CUE THE SNOW SPOT

Recently, a local, Washington station aired a syndicated weekend feature, entitled "Fantasy Park." It was a simulated rock concert complete with interviews of the stars, crowd noises and stage introductions of the best of today's rock music. Just about everyone that I talked to that had heard the presentation, bought the concept. Similarly, I've been in contact with a New York producer who has for the past two years been working

on a syndicated, three-hour children's radio series. He has lined up a national sponsor and will be offering the program "free of charge" to stations shortly after the first of the year. The show will be built around those qualities of radio that lend themselves to delighting kids' imaginations.

Most of us enjoy radio. We have fun with it and we're looking for new, creative ways of promoting it.

I must confess that my knowledge of Public radio is limited, but my impression is that Public stations tend to rely primarily on newspaper publicity, program-guides and on-air ID's to carry their call letters into the community. Another impression is that real promotion -- ala commercial radio -- is seldom considered because it is thought to "be a trifle gimmicky." But, if you stop to analyze some of the better promotions in commercial radio, you'll find them to be quite often ingenious. There's a reason for that. These promotions rely on one chief ingredient -- community participation and involvement.

I'm not a theoretician, so I can't say to what extent Public radio stations <u>should</u> be involved in promotion. I'm a practioner. practitioner. I know that when a station depends upon its community for support as commercial radio has to do, and as more and more Public stations tend to be doing in order to financially support their operations, then you must be committed to developing bona fide radio promotion, whose goal is "to increase your listening audience."

When I attend a convention of this nature, I always look for one or two concrete ideas to take home with me. Sessions like this always produce a great amount of verbiage,but that usually can't help you run a daily operation. So, I'd like to list for you, cafeteria style, several promotions -- each of which has been labeled "The Outstanding Promotion at My Station" by a broadcaster. If not the promotion itself, perhaps you can adapt some of these ideas to work for you.

* WLBB, Carrollton, GA.	"Farmer's Market" WLBB promo's advertised a "Vegetable of the Day." Space provided on the lawn of the station.
* WKAY, Glasgow, KY.	"Radio Essay Contest" provided for participation from the community and schools.
* WOBM-FM, Toms River, NJ.	Many stations such as WOBM-FM use a "Program/Promotion Fact Sheet" that is sent to local retailers. I'm sure that many of you already have a program guide, but are not sending it to the business community. Since you will probably need their support, why not include them in your mailings?
* KSD, St. Louis, MO.	1) "Alibi Contest" listeners mailed in their best alibis. One secretary replied, "Sorry I'm late, boss, but my husband left me this morning, and I had to help him pack."
	2) "Stop Smoking Campaign." KSD developed a "kit" with valuable information on how to stop smoking. They used their call letters on it; on-air interviews with non-smokers, physicians and cancer society representatives; news reports; and announcer support.
* WCGC, Belmont, NC.	"Kiwanis Day" station run by Kiwanis for a day. All proceeds from ads went to Kiwanis.

* WFMR, Milwaukee, WI. The station aired promos declaring "Let's Bring Bach the Graffiti," and collected from its listeners such lines as "Sousa's Helpers Are Band Aids," "Good Critics Don't Pan Handel" and "Tubas Play with Oophasis" which were collected and put into a booklet called "Off the Bach Wall" in the "Classical Graffiti Contest."

Of course, you can use other media to promote your station, such as:

OUTDOOR: BE CREATIVE. One broadcaster I know, from Danville, Virginia, puts them everywhere form the normal roadside billboard to the less used sides of buildings and in the middle of parking lots of shopping centers. He will get an adjoining sponsor on many of his signs who will in many cases bear the brunt of the costs. More sophisticated uses include billboards using a light that blinks on in traffic to signal a weather cast.

NEWSPAPER: WGEM, Quincy, IL., uses NEWSPAPER IRON-ON.

PIN-ON BUTTONS: KWNO, Winona, MN., uses "RADIO IS BEAUTIFUL" theme.

TV: Brattleboro, VT., 10-sec. using NAB's RADIO MONTH THEME.

Promoting radio means that you've got to believe in it and be committed to it. When I worked in public broadcasting, promotion meant publicity -- and that's all. I hope none of you are confusing the two. They're both important, but they are not the same. I don't care whether you are in Public radio or not, as far as I'm concerned the name of the promotion game is "sales." Call it your fancy names, if you will -- like community development -- we are still marketing a product and that, my friends, is "sales." The best means to achieve that is through creative promotion -- because the pictures are prettier on radio.